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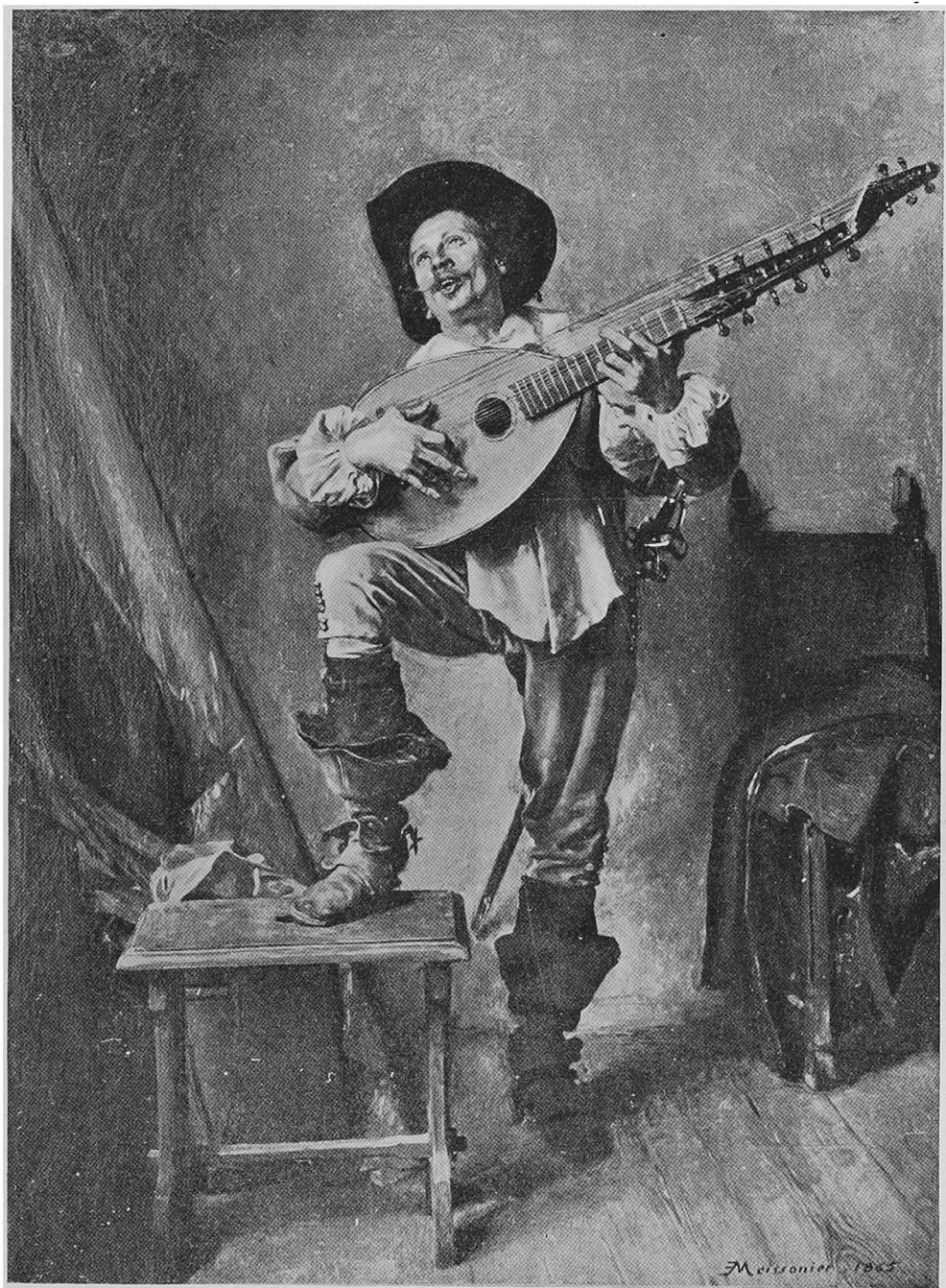
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THE TROUBADOUR
From the painting by Meissonier
In the Metropolitan Museum of Art

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TROUBADOURS AND THEIR SONGS

FRENCH SONGS
BY JOHN OXFORD

FRANCE has always held a prominent position among nations as a land of song-writers. In the middle ages no songster vied with the French troubadour, and the XIX century can exhibit no lyrist out of France, who has had an influence on the mass of his countrymen to be compared with that exercised by Béranger on the citizens of Paris.

The origin of French song is traced by antiquarians as far back as the origin of the French monarchy, and it seems that a Latin song sung by the French in the year 600, to celebrate a victory gained over the Saxons, is still in existence, together with two others of the same period, and in the same language, one of which has the peculiarity of a refrain or burden. After this date, a gap ensues which extends over five centuries, but this may fairly be attributed not so much to a loss of the poetical gift on the part of the nation, as to a want of efficient means to preserve its fruits.

The troubadour was a poet by profession; his art was known as the "gay saber,"

or "gay science," and was highly respected, as well as, often, exceedingly profitable. The poet was always a musician, and for the most part composed his own airs, but this is not saying much. Musical art was quite in its infancy, and the dull plain-song, composed in notes of equal value, contrast strangely with the light and gallant themes of the poetry.

The title of "Father of French Poetry" is usually awarded to Thibault, Count of Champagne, (1203-1251) whose songs are mostly in honor of Queen Blanche of Castile, Mother of St. Louis. He receives this honor, not so much on account of his antiquity, as on account of his merit, the French critics deciding that the poets who preceded him are not worthy of the name.

It is towards the end of the XI century that we begin to have accurate information respecting the writers. One Pierre de Blois became renowned for his gallant effusions, and the famous Abelard not only wrote songs but is said to have sung them with a very agreeable voice.

Early in the XII century, the French tongue entirely supplanted the rhymed Latin, which preceded it as the language of song, and the tradition of this period seems to be still preserved in a number of childish ditties which are sung at the present day, and which are usually associated with games having an indirect reference to the pursuits of a chivalric period.

Olivier Basselin, a fuller of Vire in Normandy, who distinguished himself from his more refined and pious predecessors by chanting coarse, jovial strains in praise, not of fair ladies or of saints, but of wine and cider, is supposed to be the inventor of the *Vau-de-Vire*, a word which has since been corrupted into Vaudeville.

THE TROUBADOURS CONCEPTION OF LOVE

By J. ANGLADE

The ancient Provençale poetry is marked from its beginning by a profound originality. Neither in its substance nor in its form does it resemble anything which preceded it. The form is perfect and has no model in either Greek or Latin poetry. From one end of its existence to the other the poetry of the troubadours lived of itself and not by borrowing. This originality manifests itself especially in the conception of love, which the troubadours have held. They are the first in modern poesy to express in incomparable style the sentiments which this passion inspires; they forced their conception upon the aristocratic society of their time; they have imposed it on their imitators: French poets, Italian, Portuguese, and even German poets. It is important to record a theory wherein one finds in its infancy the principal modern poetry, and to mark at the same time its evolution: for, although the ancient Provençale poetry had but a brief existence, it did not escape the law which presides over literatures, and the societies of which they are the reflection.

Those troubadours who followed the Count of Poictiers were influenced by the ideas of their times, which seem to have been of a more gentle character in the Midi than in the North. While the North pleased itself with epics, the Méridional

poets cultivated lyric poetry, and complimentary verse. Love is very early the sole theme of their songs. They conceive it as a cult, almost as a religion. It has its laws—its rights; together they form a sort of code of perfect love. The code is severe and the laws rigorous; the lover may not depart from them with impunity, but must submit to their discipline.

Lovers comported themselves toward love like a vassal in the presence of his lord. Service is a part of love. The lover became the liege-servant of the loved lady, or even Love personified; he carried out her wishes, he obeys her slightest caprice. To be a lover is to bind oneself, like a knight, by a vow; one accepts all the rigorous bonds which a vow of the kind imposes, according to the ideas of the time. The lover is not a slave, he preserves his nobility; but he is a vassal. The vassalage of love is an invention of the troubadour; it bears the mark of the time, and the two terms of its expression characterize the spirit and ideas of the epoch.

One of the first qualities requisite was discretion. Ordinarily the troubadours only mentioned their ladies by some name of their own bestowing, "*Belle vue*," "*Aimanante*," "*Mieux que Bien*." From the beginning to the end of Provençale literature the custom is constant. This, you must

recollect, was because the troubadours addressed themselves only to married women. To sing of love for a young girl is entirely exceptional in their poetry.

Another requisite quality was patience—patience without measure and without bounds. Rigaud de Barbezieux says “Patience is the magic word, the talisman before which the heart of the beloved will open.” The finer troubadours praised the merits of “patience and long waiting.” The *Méridionaux* of this epoch were not nervous.

More than one troubadour became impatient without doubt. Then they assumed a tragic tone to soften the rigor of the lady. “The whole world will learn how the hardness of your heart causes my death,” said one of them. But these were only complaints and menaces. Suicides were rare. We do not know even one certain example. It was less rare that the unhappy troubadour retired from the world, and entered one of the religious orders: the number of troubadours who so ended their lives is quite considerable.

They were not exacting in love, they were content with little; at least so they said. The greater number begged of their ladies only to accept them as servitors; to accept their poetic homage, nothing more. Some are precise in the expression of their desires, but in general the *vœux* are timid and modest: this is in accordance with the rule. Unsuccessful lovers show themselves to lack discretion and necessary reserve.

When the beloved lady finally deigns to receive his devotion and admit the troubadour to her presence, what timidity and awkwardness he displays! Here is the form under which Rigaud de Barbezieux makes known to us his impressions: “I am like,” he says; “Parcefal, who was seized with such admiration at the sight of the Lance and the Holy Grail, that he could

not ask what they were for; thus Lady, when I see your beautiful form, I lose myself in admiration; I wish to address to you a prayer but I cannot—I dream.” “It often happens,” said the troubadour Peire Raimon de Toulouse, “that I wish to address to you, Lady, a prayer, but when I am near you I forget it.” “When I behold her,” avows Bernard de Ventadour, “one may see in my eyes and colour how I tremble with fear like a leaf in the wind. I am so overcome by love that I have no more reason than a child.” “I dare not disclose to her my pain when I happen to see her,” says Armant de Maruelh in his turn; “I can only adore her.”

Far from their ladies, the troubadours are more eloquent; but they are no less discreet and timid, knowing that it is very bad form for a perfect lover not to know how to moderate his desires. It is not rare for one to console himself in this separation, and even to find in it a charm. The troubadour imagines that a mysterious tie which defies distance unites him to his Lady. One of the most gracious representatives of Provençale poetry, Bernard de Ventadour, expresses himself thus: “Lady, if my eyes see you not, know that my heart sees you.” The beginning of another of his songs is celebrated: “When the sweet air is wafted from your country, it seems to me that I inhale an odor of Paradise, because of my love of the beautiful Lady towards whom my heart yearns.”

The charm and delicacy of this poetic conception, even presented in fragmentary form, are notable. One cannot sufficiently admire the poets, who, in the Middle Ages, at a time when ideas were rude even in the Midi, have known how to present love in such gracious accents.

What shall one say of the moral perfection of which love is equally the principle? The troubadours had no terms strong enough to exalt the perfections of

the beloved object. Their lady is distinguished from all others by the beauty and grace of her body, and also by her moral qualities; she is wise and good; all the gifts of heart and spirit are united in her. "As the light of day surpasses all other light, thus, Lady, it seems to me that you surpass all women by your beauty, by your gentleness, and your courtesy." Let us recall now the bond of vassalage in love invented by the troubadours; to gain the favor of a perfect mistress must not one seek perfection? And were not the troubadours right to affirm that love is a principle of morality? Literary perfection and moral perfection are the results of perfect love.

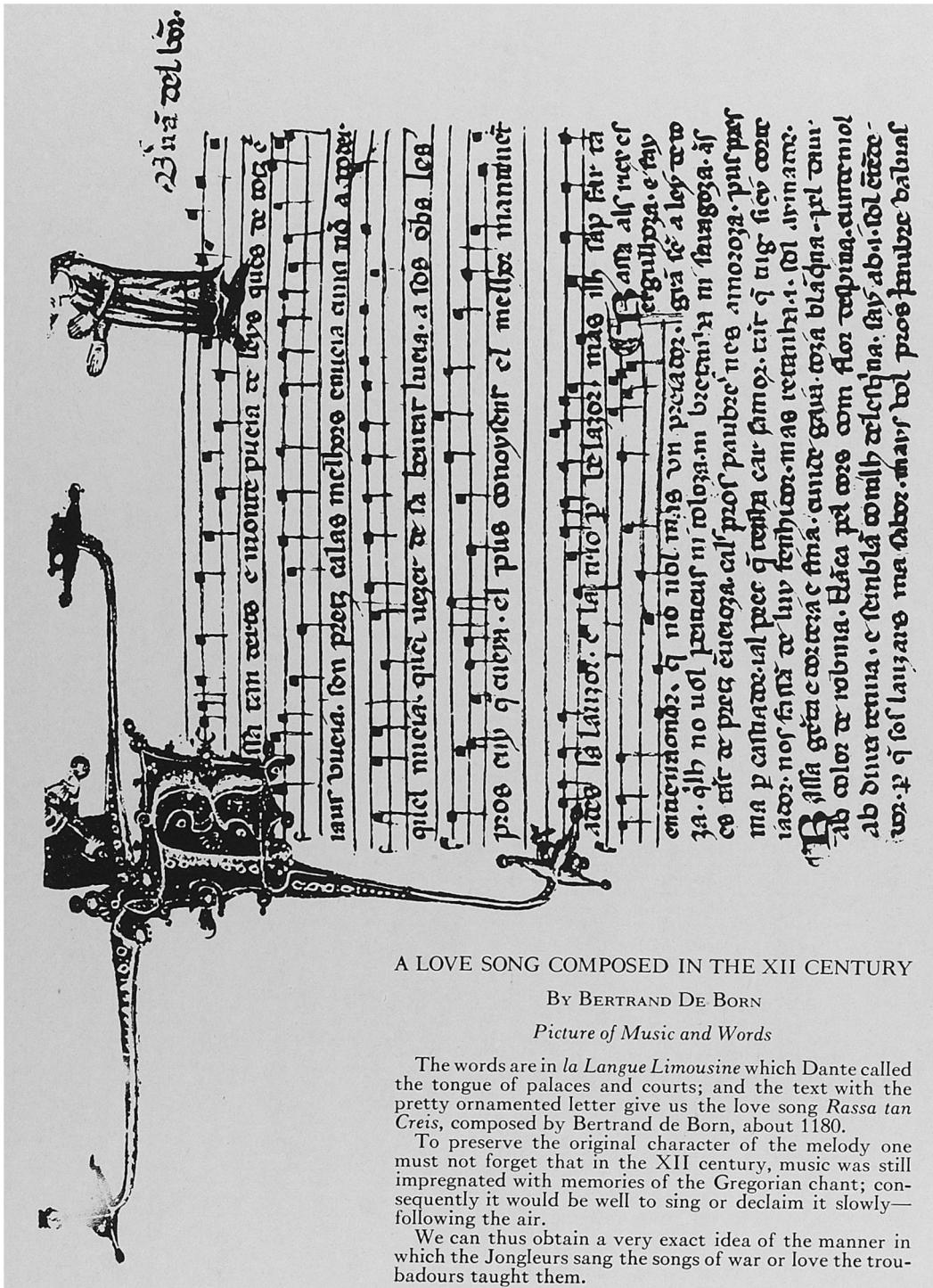
And yet in this conception of love we are obliged to admit that there is something artificial—very slightly allied to reality. The theory of the troubadours was only a poetic theory developed to an ever-increasing extravagance during the two centuries that the ancient Provençale poetry lasted. When one reads the prettiest songs of Bernard de Ventadour, d'Arnaud Daniel, or of Giraut de Bornelh, one has no difficulty in agreeing with Diez, the first historian of Provençale literature, that love, as the troubadours conceived it, represents rather a play of wit than a passion of the heart. "Love was conceived as an art, and had its rules like poetry." Thus the poetic Code where, in the XIV century, the principles of the grammar of the metric Provençales were resumed, was called "The Laws of Love." Love and poetry having become synonymous terms.

It is easy to divine the consequences of this conception. In remaining faithful to it, Provençale poetry condemned itself to short life; thus it soon attained its height, and its decadence followed shortly. It was easy to find new meters, and until the end, the troubadours invented them with marvelous virtuosity, it was much less easy to

rejuvenate a poetic conception which had sprung complete and perfect from the brain of the first troubadours. At the beginning of the XII century—scarcely a century after the birth of Provençale poetry—the love-poetry had produced its best models; Provençale poetry, to live, would have been obliged to reinforce itself; to absorb something of the spirit of other kinds. We have no reason to believe that they would not have succeeded. But a grave political event, which changed the social condition of all of the Midi of France, came to arrest positively the development of a poetry wherein existed already the germs of decadence.

The political consequences of the "crusade" against the Albigenses were important; the influence of this event upon the ideas of Méridional society, and consequently upon its literature, were not less so. The establishment of the Inquisition, and the spread of religious orders, renewed in the Midi if not faith, at least orthodoxy. The cult of the Virgin above all developed with a rush; the disciples of Saint Dominic contributed more than all others, by their proselyting to this development. Under these influences religious poetry, which the first troubadours had nearly ignored, enlarged its domain, and soon formed a veritable species.

It was the love-poetry which profited most by this transformation, it found new inspiration in the cult of the Virgin. The mother of Christ became for the troubadours the "Lady" above all others. They employed to sing their love all the forms which their predecessors had invented to sing terrestrial love. They declared themselves lovers, timid and discreet; they exalted the object of their new love, and employed so well the terms and the forms of profane love-poetry that it is sometimes difficult to discover whether the object of their love is terrestrial or celestial.



RASSA TAN CREIS

CHANT D'AMOUR COMPOSÉ PAR BERTRAND DE BORN VERS 1180
ET TRANSCRIT PAR M. LE BARON DE LA TOMBELLE.

Ras - sa tan creis e mon - ta è po - ja Ce la qu'es
Rassa, elle croît, monte et grandit si bien. la réputation

de totz en - jans vo - ja, Sos prets a les au - tras e - no - ja,
de celle qui n'a jamais trahi, son charme excite si justement l'admiration.

Qu'u - na no-i a que re-i no - ja; Quel ve - zers
Que nulle femme ne saurait lui faire tort; la vue de sa

de sa beu - tat lo - ja Los pros a sos oys, cui que co - ja;
grâce attache les preux à son service, sans qu'elle les recherche,

Quelh plus co - nois - sen elh mel - hor Man - te - nen
Les plus connaisseurs et les meilleurs chantent partout

a - dèe - sa lau - zor E la te - nen per la gen - sor;
ses louanges et la tiennent pour la plus belle;

Qu'il sap far tant en - tie - ra o - nor, No vol
Elle sait se faire respecter et elle

mas un 'sol pre - ja. - dor.
ne veut qu'un seul soupirant.

XIII CENTURY SONGS

A SONG BY THE KING OF NAVARRE.

Love makes me begin a new song,
Because it taught me
To love the most beautiful lady
In the whole world;
It is the fair one of beauteous form,
It is of her that I sing;
God give me such news of her
As I desire,
For quickly and often
My heart leaps at the thought of her.

SONG BY RICHART DE SEMILLI.

Ten of his songs are extant—both words and music.

I have taken courage to sing,
To praise the fairest lady,
A task to which I am not accustomed;
But the same love makes me sing
Which often makes me tremble,
The torments of love are madness;
I know well, that if they be not ceased,
I cannot endure for long.

Preserved in the Bibliotheque d' l'Arsenal, Paris.

"Madame," says one of them, "wishes neither flattering nor adoring suppliants, but she wishes perfect lovers, neither false nor fickle, for she is neither fickle nor false; never does she adorn nor paint herself, she listens to no gallantries, but each perfect lover has obtained of her recompense."

Thus spoke Folquet de Lunel; his contemporary, Guirant Riquier, expresses himself in the same way: "The one whom I love is the most gracious and the loveliest that ever was. Love so inspires me for her that it would not be possible for me to fear her, nor honor her, nor love her as she merits... May God, who is able, cause me to bear before her the banner of perfect lovers, over whom Love reigns."

At the same time that profane poetry transformed itself into religious poetry, the troubadours brought some modifications to their conception of love: that poetic evolution, of which we have spoken, appears in this new conception.

We do not know whether the Inquisition or rather the Church, was hard on the troubadours; we have some sayings on the subject, it is true, which are significant. But under the influence of religious ideas the poets ended by seeing only sin in love, as did the theologians. More than one was moved to relate how he conceived this passion. There are some very curious declarations on the point by the Italian troubadour, Sordello, but, to keep to the troubadours of France, here is an extract from the poems of Montagnagol. (Middle of the XIII century.)

"Lovers ought to serve Love with all their hearts, for love is not a sin, but a virtue, which makes the bad good and the good better, and puts a man in the way to do good all his days; and from love comes chastity, for he who understands Love well cannot conduct himself ill."

This, then, is the manner in which the

troubadours of the decadence conceived love. One understands better, in studying this conception, how the transformation of the songs of love into the songs of religion came about. The last troubadours had only to enlarge upon the qualities which they attributed to the beloved object, and upon the virtues which they exacted from the lover; this love so purified, so etherealized, one might say is already the mystic love of the worshipers of the Virgin.

With the end of the XIII century the ancient Provençale poetry terminated. A century after the Albigensian Crusade and the establishment of the Inquisition, after the ruin of the nobility and the rule of the middle classes in the more important cities of the Midi—the mental attitude of the Méridional was no longer the same as in the XII century. The new troubadours borrowed from those who immediately preceded them, their conception of love. They went further; the profane love song was forbidden; the only Lady to whom it was permitted to sing of love was the Virgin. It is to her that during the following centuries the neo-troubadours addressed their poetic homage.

The poetry *de langue d'Oc* vegetated thus during the following centuries. This period was not, however, a long night. It produced interesting essays in Gascony in renaissance literature during the XVI and the XVII centuries, and even at Toulouse in the XVII century. But the imitation of the French poetry is noticeable in the writers of the Renaissance, notably in Goudelin. It had no more traditions; the chain was broken. It was reserved for the modern Provençale poets to reestablish it and to create a new conception of love. In the continually recurring revival of their spirit and form, Mistral has been their most marvelous follower. The marvel has consisted in reviving a poetry which had

its rise and produced its chief works more than six centuries before. It has sufficed for the greatest poets of our days to return to Nature; to let the heart speak, and not the wit alone. What an work it would be to rewrite in one volume specimens of Provençale poetry from its most ancient origin down to our own day; from the Count de Poictiers, XI and XII centuries, to Mistral! The troubadours would have therein a large place, merited by their talent

and by the influence which their poetry has exercised upon that of modern nations; but the later comers—Mistral first—in whose glory Jasmin shares, together with Aubanal, Roumanille, and Félix Gras, brilliantly sustain comparison with their illustrious forerunners. If both ancient and modern possessed the cult of art, the later poets had more of life, and in poetry this is of more value than all else.

Mercure de France, Paris.

OLD FRENCH SONG OF THE PERIOD OF LOUIS XV

L'AMOUR EST UN ENFANT TROMPEUR

PAR M. H. COLET

Professeur d'Harmonie au Conservatoire

L'amour est un enfant trompeur,
Me dit souvent ma mère:
Avec son air plein de douceur,
C'est pis qu'une vipére.
Je voudrais bien savoir, pourtant,
Quel mal si grand d'un jeune enfant
Peut craindre une bergère.

Je vis hier le beau Lucas
Assis près de Glycère:
Il lui parlait tout près, tout bas;
Et, d'un air bien sincère,
Il lui vantait un Dieu charmant:
Ce Dieu c'était précisément
L'enfant que craint ma mère.

Pour sortir de cet embarras,
Et savoir le mystère,
Cherchons l'amour avec colas,
Sans rien dire à ma mère
Et supposé qu'il soit méchant,
Nous serons deux contre un enfant:
Quel mal peut-il nous faire?

Lise a vu, dit-on, cet enfant
Que redoutait sa mère,
L'a-t-elle trouvé fort méchant?
Elle en fait un mystère;
Mais on sait bien qu'avec colas,
Lise, en rougissant, dit tout bas:
Je ne crois plus ma mère.